

escape from the world of male domination and the drudgery imposed upon the wife and mother in an ever-growing household.

*Aftermath.* By the early sixteenth century the great days of the monasteries were long over. Protestant reformers and monarchs greedy to confiscate their wealth, found them easy targets for their charges of idleness, self-indulgence, and vice—fornication, masturbation, and sodomy. For the most part abbeys and nunneries survived only in Catholic and Orthodox countries, where they eventually came under attack by secularists and in not a few instances saw their property sequestered by the state power. The link between religious mysticism and sexual ecstasy was inadvertently brought out in the vivid imagery of the Spanish mystics St. John of the Cross (1542–1591) and St. Teresa of Ávila (1515–1582). In an unusual, sensational case (1619–23), the lesbian sister Benedetta Carlini of Pescia, near Florence, created a complex visionary world of magic in which she enveloped her lovers. *La Religieuse*, a posthumously published novel by Denis Diderot (1713–1784), portrays graphically, even melodramatically, the distress of a nun at the hands of a lesbian prioress. After the end of the Old Regime this work was followed by a large class of exposé literature, perpetuated by the anti-clerical movement at the close of the nineteenth century, and designed to flay the Catholic church as a redoubt of the vicious and depraved and to undermine its self-proclaimed sanctity.

At the present time it is hard to know (and harder even to appraise the situation in historical epochs) what proportion of Catholic and Orthodox members of religious orders are homosexual and, of these, how many are practicing. Probably both figures are much higher than the ecclesiastical authorities would care to admit. As in former times, abbots seek to inhibit the formation of erotically charged pair-bonds by separating "particular friends." But declining vocations and applications of religious for return to lay

status make such interventions seem counterproductive: if monasteries are to survive as an institution a less harsh regime may be required. In 1985 considerable stir was caused by the publication of *Lesbian Nuns: Breaking the Silence* (edited by Rosemary Curb and Nancy Manahan), which contains autobiographical accounts by some fifty women.

Though it has its obvious sociological aspect (the magnetism of a homosexual environment), the question of gay and lesbian religious is part of a broader interface between homoeroticism and religious feeling that extends from the shamanism of the paleo-Arctic cultures to the occult underground of today. Albeit explored by such pioneers as Rozanov and Edward Carpenter, it is yet to be fully recognized or understood by researchers into the phenomena of religion.

*See also Christianity; Clergy, Gay; Medieval Latin Poetry; Middle Ages; Patristic Writers.*

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### MONTAIGNE, MICHEL EYQUEM DE (1533–1592)

French courtier, essayist, and thinker. In 1571, during the French religious wars, he retired from the *Parlement* of Bordeaux and, after inheriting his father's estate, lived in seclusion at his chateau. Here, isolated in a tower to avoid visitors, he wrote his *Essais*, published in 1580. After a stint as mayor of Bordeaux he again returned in 1588. Inspired by the Latin classics and by Plutarch's *Parallel Lives of Famous Greeks and Romans*, he skeptically considered the careers and beliefs of the prominent figures of his own time. His *Essais* influenced both French and English literature, being considered models of

precise style and of accurate analysis. Although France has no universal writer like Shakespeare, Cervantes, Dante, and Goethe, Montaigne, who like all of them had a homosexual or at least homoerotic side, is one of the outstanding French writers before the classical age of the seventeenth century. With his elder contemporary François Rabelais (ca. 1494–1553), he helped modernize French prose, soon after his death standardized by the Académie Française, founded in 1635 by Cardinal Richelieu and the homosexual Abbé de Boisrobert.

About 1558 Montaigne, while serving on the parlement of Bordeaux, developed an intense affection for a young judge, Etienne de La Boétie, author of an essay, "Against One Man," honoring liberty against tyrants. This passion inspired his composition "On Friendship" in the *Essais*. There he asserts that friendship is more passionate than the "impetuous and fickle" love for women and superior to marriage, which one can enter at will but not leave. He concedes that physical intimacy between males "is justly abhorred by our moral notions," while the "disparity of age and difference of station" which the Greeks demanded "would not correspond sufficiently to the perfect union that we are seeking here." Montaigne condemns pederasty because of the age asymmetry between the partners, "simply founded on external beauty, the false image of corporeal generation," but approves fully of intense friendship between men of the same age, "friendship that possesses the soul and rules it with absolute sovereignty." In this respect he is a forerunner of modern, age-symmetrical, androphile homosexuality. Physical beauty means less than the "marriage of two minds" such as he contracted with his friend, who died some five years later, in 1563, of dysentery, leaving Montaigne with a memory that haunted him all the rest of his days. Never again would such an enthralling experience befall him, but the great love of

his life underlay his classic essay on friendship.

Also relevant to homosexuality are the "Apology for Raymond Sebond" and "On Some Verses of Vergil." So if Montaigne could not openly defend physical intimacy between men, he at least evoked the ancient ideal of friendship, anticipating the modern notion of homosexuality.

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### MONTESQUIOU, COUNT ROBERT DE (1855–1921)

French aristocrat, poet, and aesthete. Descended from the d'Artagnan of *The Three Musketeers*, he spent most of his wealth on collecting art objects and throwing parties, as well as vanity-press editions of his own books. He was the model for Jean des Esseintes in the novel *A Rebours* by Joris-Karl Huysmans (1884), Phocas in Jean Lorrain's novel *Mons. de Phocas* (1902), the Peacock in Rostand's play "Chantecler" (1910), and Baron de Charlus in Proust's *Sodome et Gomorrhe* (1921), all of which portray his flamboyance and homosexuality. However, he was so afraid of scandal that he avoided associating with notorious homosexuals and was so discreet in his sexual life that there is no proof that he ever had sex with any of the handsome young men in his entourage. The great love of his life was a South American, Gabriel Yturri, whom he met in 1885 and who died in 1905. Montesquiou wrote some poems on homosexual themes. Although he was a glittering center of Parisian society, he is remembered today only as the original of Charlus and des Esseintes, and Giovanni Boldini's portrait of him is on the cover of the Penguin paperback edition of Huysmans' novel.